

IS MODERN  
METHODISM WESLEYAN METHODISM?

OR,

WESLEYAN METHODISM AND THE  
CHURCH OF ENGLAND,

BEING A SEQUEL TO

“WAS JOHN WESLEY A HIGH CHURCHMAN?”

*A DIALOGUE FOR THE TIMES.*

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*THE following Tract, like that of which it is the sequel —“ Was John Wesley a High Churchman ? ”— has been written at the request of the Wesleyan Book Committee. The dialogue is supposed to take place, as in the former Tract, between the Rector, in a country town, and his neighbour, the Wesleyan Minister.*

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## IS MODERN METHODISM WESLEYAN METHODISM?

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*Rector.*—I have called on you this morning hoping we may be able to resume the conversation of which we finished only one section on my last visit. I intimated, as you may remember, that I should probably tax your kindness by another call, with a view to clearing up my views on another part of the general subject of Wesleyan Methodism and its relations to the Church of England.

*Wes. Min.*—I remember distinctly that you referred to the separate position in regard to the Church of England which our body holds to-day, as a point upon which you were in perplexity. I have borne your intimation in mind, and have prepared myself, with some care, to answer such questions as you may wish to put respecting this subject. It can, indeed, only be a pleasure to answer the inquiries of a candid and liberal Churchman like yourself. But I do not clearly understand at present to what, in particular, your perplexity relates. I cannot suppose that you think that no body of Christians has any right to exist outside the Church of England. I presume that your difficulties have a particular relation to Methodism as such.

*Rector.*—My difficulties have a special relation to *Wesleyan* Methodism, to your own form of Methodism. You name yourselves after John Wesley, but it seems to me that you do not walk in his ways. He belonged to the Church, whereas you have renounced the Church. Should you not either return to our Church, or cease to surname your Methodism with his name?

*Wes. Min.*—You put your question sharply, and you do not mean to put it unfairly; and yet your putting is so far incorrect, that an examination of its terms will suffice to deprive your dilemma of all its apparent cogency. For, during Wesley's lifetime, some of his followers—not a few of his own people—renounced the Church of England; of these some were express and theoretical Dissenters,—Dissenters in principle,—while many others refused to go to Church, either to attend the ordinary services, or on sacramental occasions, because the clergymen were not, in their judgment, proper persons to sustain the ministerial office. And yet Mr. Wesley did not put these persons out of his Society. They remained Methodists, original Methodists, Wesley's own people, although they forsook the Church, or at least their own parish churches—although some of them deliberately renounced the Church altogether.

*Rector.*—I presume that you do not make this statement without distinct evidence to sustain it.

*Wes. Min.*—There is ample evidence in Wesley's journals and in his letters, and I shall be glad presently to show you as much as will fully satisfy you on the point. But I have not quite finished my criticism of the form of your dilemma. I have stated that a man might, in Wesley's own lifetime, be a member of his



Society, and yet renounce the Church of England. I wish to add, on the other hand, that because a man is a Wesleyan Methodist to-day, he is not therefore to be understood as necessarily renouncing the Church of England. There are to-day not a few Wesleyan Methodists who have a friendly regard to the Church of England, who seek its peace, and not its evil; and of these some, like John Howe, two centuries ago, are "occasional conformists" or communicants. Wesleyan Methodism has never required its members to disown or to condemn the Church of England.

*Rector.*—I shall not be sorry to be obliged to retreat from the ground assumed in my question. But am I to understand that Methodism in John Wesley's days was not an organisation within the Church of England; that it was not a society belonging to the Church of England?

*Wes. Min.*—That is what I mean. Many members of the Society were also members of the Church of England, but all were not, nor was there any requirement that they should be. Some, as I have already stated and will presently give passages to prove, were professed Dissenters. Many more had stood in no relation to the Church of England, or to any other Church—had been practically heathen before they became Methodists—and, although Wesley tried, he was not able in all cases to persuade such as these to attend their parish church. When, in no small number of cases, the parish minister was distinguished by his opposition to Methodism and his hostility to its members,—when, in some instances, the ministers had even led mobs or invited ruffians to assail Wesley and his people

with cruel violence, it is no wonder if many of the Society abstained from going to church. Wesley's Societies, in short, even in his lifetime, were not included within the Church of England, although many of the members individually belonged to the Church.

*Rector.*—But, at a later stage, when the early unhappy and inexcusable instances of persecution had come to an end, and Wesley had organised his Societies permanently, was not the body of Methodists united with the Church of England?

*Wes. Min.*—I can only repeat what I have already said. Many Methodists were themselves personally members of the Church of England—though a continually increasing number were not—but the Society, as such, was in no sense or degree any part or any dependency of that Church. It had no organic connection with it whatever. The parish clergy, as such, had no authority in the Society—they stood in no relation with it. Some three or four parish clergymen during fifty years connected themselves with Mr. Wesley as his helpers, and put themselves under his orders. These were *thus* brought into connection with his Societies. But otherwise, and as parish ministers, the clergy had no relation whatever to John Wesley's Societies. Nor had the bishops, or any bishop, any authority over the Society, or in the Conference, or, so far as regarded his Methodist work and his relation to his Societies, over John Wesley. Methodism, therefore, *as an organisation*, was altogether outside of the Church of England during Wesley's own lifetime. How then can a charge of impropriety, or even of in-

consistency, be brought against Wesleyan Methodism to-day on the ground that it stands separate from the Church of England? Methodism as an organisation, as a system of society united under one government, has always stood by itself; it was never incorporated with the Church of England.

*Rector.*—Your line of statement seems to throw my thoughts into confusion. You cannot intend to say that no change of importance, bearing upon the question in hand, has taken place in Methodism since the time of Wesley.

*Wes. Min.*—I am dealing with your own question—as to Methodism, in John Wesley's days, being an organisation within the Church of England, a Society belonging to that Church. That it was so is assumed habitually by Churchmen. Of course, when it is shown that this was not the case, the first effect is a sense of confusion on the part of those whose thoughts are all coloured and distorted by this fallacious assumption. As a matter of fact, there is nothing whatever to sustain this assumption. Every tittle of history and of evidence bears out the view which I have stated. No evidence, indeed, is ever offered on this point by Churchmen. What they need as a foundation to build upon is simply taken for granted. When, however, you ask me if no change of importance, bearing upon the question in hand, has taken place in Methodism since the time of Wesley, I have to answer that the character of Methodism, since the time of Wesley, has undoubtedly been changed by natural development in several important respects, but in no such respect as to lay our body open to the charge of having departed from



Wesley's principles, or of having taken a course inconsistent with the name we bear. On the contrary, we stand where we stand to-day because we have followed straight along the lines which Wesley marked out; the changes which have been consummated since Wesley's death were initiated by his own hand. It is hardly the right method, however, in this conversation, for me to launch into an historical statement as to Wesley's principles of action, and the manner in which the development of these principles has brought Methodism into its present position. My business is to listen to your objections or your doubts, and to give you a fair and frank answer to them. After I have done this, I will set forth our own view of our position, if you wish me so to do. May I ask you to be somewhat more explicit as to the wrong-doing of modern Methodists as compared with early Methodists, and, in particular, as to the points in which we Methodists to-day are alleged to have violated or abandoned the principles of our Founder?

*Rector.*—You have told me that Methodism was at no time organically united with the Church of England, and that, during Wesley's life-time, there were not a few Methodists who did not belong, in any sense, to the Church of England. But you will hardly deny that Wesley did repeatedly warn his people against separating from the Church of England, and, indeed, that he told them that if the Methodists separated from the Church of England God would leave them. Do you admit this? And if you do, what have you to say respecting it?

*Wes. Min.*—I am not prepared to deny this; I admit it frankly; and yet I hold to all that I have said.



Strange as it may seem to you at first, there is no real inconsistency here. It is necessary first to understand what Wesley meant by separating from the Church of England, and, in the next place, to remember that what he so earnestly deprecated was a formal and collective act of separation on the part of the Methodist Conference and people. I fear you will wonder more and more when I say that, in John Wesley's sense, Wesleyan Methodism has never yet separated from the Church of England.

*Rector.*—Certainly you amaze me; I await your explanations with no common interest.

*Wes. Min.*—Anticipating that you would be calling to converse on the question now before us, I have selected some passages from Wesley's writings, which will, I think, make the point I have stated very clear.

In 1755, writing to the Rev. Mr. Walker, rector of Truro, Wesley discusses this very question of separation distinctly, and at some length. I quote one striking passage from this correspondence :

"At present I apprehend those, and those only, to separate from the Church, who either renounce her fundamental doctrines, or refuse to join in her public worship. As yet we have done neither."—*Works*, vol. xiii., 12mo, p. 186.

Again he says, writing in 1789 to the *Dublin Chronicle* :

"The Rev. Edward Smyth earnestly advised me to leave the Church; meaning thereby (as all sensible men do) to *renounce all connection with it, to attend the service of it no more, and to advise all our Societies to take the same steps.* . . . His reasons were severally considered and answered, and we all determined not to leave the Church."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. xiii., p. 256.

The same question was on various occasions brought before the Conference in Wesley's life-time. Wesley himself was continually charged with being a Dissenter, and that with much more reason than Wesleyan Methodists to-day—on the ground that Methodism does not give up its identity, unbind its organisation, and, in the moment of its dissolution, exhort its scattered members to betake themselves to the Church of England—are charged with inconsistency, as followers of Wesley. Wesley, his preachers, and his people, were all often called Dissenters together. In 1766, therefore, the question was asked and answered in the Conference: "Are we not Dissenters?" Wesley says in reply:

"We are irregular: 1. By calling sinners to repentance in *all places* of God's dominion; 2. By frequently using *extemporary prayer*. Yet we are *not Dissenters* in the only sense which our law acknowledges, *namely, persons who believe it is sinful to attend the service of the Church*."—*Minutes*, New Edition, vol. i., p. 58.

Similarly, in 1785, writing in the *Arminian Magazine* as to his ordaining elders for the American Church, he says:

"If any one is pleased to call this separating from the Church, he may. But the law of England does not call it so; nor can any one properly be said so to do, unless, *out of conscience*, he *refuses* to join in the service and partake of the sacraments administered therein."—*Arminian (or Methodist) Magazine*, 1786, p. 677.

And, in his sermon on "The Ministerial Office," preached in 1789, he thus states the case very clearly:

"Many warm men say, 'You *do* separate from the Church.'

Others are equally warm because they say I *do not*. I will nakedly declare the thing as it is. I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her Liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline, and only wish it could be put in execution. I do not knowingly vary from any rule of the Church, unless in those few instances where I judge, and as far as I judge, there is an absolute necessity." [He instances "preaching abroad," "praying extempore," organising his Societies in classes, holding Conferences, and in those Conferences stationing the preachers.] "But all this is not separating from the Church. So far from it, that whenever I have opportunity, I attend the Church service myself, and advise all our Societies so to do."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. vii., p. 266.

I could give many more passages to the same effect, but I will only give one other. It is from a letter to his brother Charles, and its date is 1785. After explaining that all he had meant from the beginning by "separating from the Church" was "refusing to go to church," he submits as his own interpretation of the 20th Article of Religion in the Prayer Book, that "The Church of England" means "all the believers in England, except Papists and Dissenters, who have the Word of God and the Sacraments administered among them."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. xiii., pp. 240-1.

So long, therefore, as the Conference did not, in the sense already defined, distinctly separate from the Church of England, Wesley held that all Methodists, not personally renouncing the Church of England and its communion, were members of that Church.

And now I will quote a passage bearing upon the other, but closely related, point, of which I have spoken, a passage to show that by the separation of his Societies, his "people," from the Church—by the separation

which he dreaded and deprecated,—he meant a distinct, collective, final act, on the part of the Conference, legislating on behalf of the Societies.

In his “Thoughts on Separation from the Church,” written in 1788, he says :

“The question properly refers (when we speak of a separation from the Church) to a *total and immediate separation*. Such was that of Mr. Ingham’s people first, and afterwards that of Lady Huntingdon’s ; who all agreed to form themselves into a separate body without delay, and to have *no more connection with the Church of England than with the Church of Rome*. Such a separation I have always declared against ; and certainly it will not take place (if ever it does) while I live. *But a kind of separation has already taken place, and will inevitably spread, though by slow degrees.*—*Works*, 12mo, vol. xiii., p. 250.

“*Such a separation*” has never taken place yet ; but the other “kind of separation” of which he here speaks has, according to his prediction, continued to spread, and has in various ways grown and developed, until now, with very few exceptions, as he foreboded might come to be the case, the Methodists everywhere “go to church no more.”—*Ibid.*

I trust the extracts which I have given—and as I have intimated, they are only a selection out of many to the like effect—have justified the statement which excited in you so much amazement. In John Wesley’s sense Wesleyan Methodism has even now never separated from the Church of England. One by one, our people ceased to frequent the services of the Church of England, but during many years before Wesley’s death a continually increasing number had ceased to do so ; and in the chief and earliest centres of Methodism, as



at London and Bristol, the habit of absence from the parish churches had, under stress of circumstances, been first of all established, by the action taken by the Wesleys themselves, Charles as well as John, and had been maintained for fifty years before Wesley's death. One by one, also, the Wesleyan Societies throughout England, after Wesley's death, followed the example set during his life by the Societies in London and Bristol, and sued out and obtained the privilege of receiving the Sacraments from their own ministers in their own places of worship. And similarly, furthermore, in response to the demand for the Sacraments, pressed upon the Conference by the Societies one after the other, the example which Wesley set, as a presbyter-bishop, in ordaining others as presbyters, to administer the Sacraments to his Societies, was followed by the Conference after Wesley's death, by the association, with the ministers so ordained by Wesley, of all their brethren who had been moved and called to the office and work of the ministry, and had passed ■ due probation.

*Rector.*—If Wesley's views were such as you have described, I cannot wonder that he was, in his life-time, called a Dissenter. Even though he did not agree with those who called themselves Dissenters, and were so according to legal definition, he certainly does not seem himself to have been a true Churchman, in any ordinary sense of the word ; practically he seems to have been very much of a Dissenter, and the movement which he created and organised, on your own showing, seems to have been one which directly tended towards ■ practical, and, in the end, complete, separation from the Church of England. Nay it would appear that, almost

from the very beginning, it did in fact amount to a complete practical separation in the case of the oldest and leading Societies. You may say that there has never yet been a legal divorce between our Church and your Connexion, but what does that assertion amount to if there has been so long an actual separation between the parties, and if the barriers in the way of a real organic union are, as all Wesleyans seem agreed in affirming, and as your statements thus far would appear to show, altogether insuperable? If, on the line of argument which you have now opened, you are to vindicate your own Connexion from the charge of having renounced the principles of your Founder, must not your vindication amount to a condemnation of your Founder himself for his singular inconsistency? Does not his practice seem to have contradicted his profession? And do not his statements and professions at one time appear to have clashed with those made at another time?

*Wes. Min.*.—Your rejoinder is very natural. I do not wonder that you think the tables may thus be turned upon me, or upon John Wesley. Nevertheless, I think you will see on reflection, that there is another alternative, although perhaps it was hardly likely to have occurred to you as a Churchman. What we say is that Wesley was obliged first of all to separate from the Church, in the sense and degree in which he did separate, because the Church repelled from its Sacraments himself and his Societies; and that afterwards, in many cases, his people, if they were not actually forbidden the Sacraments—as they sometimes were—were prevented from attending either Sacrament or church by the character and conduct, not seldom by the insults and

abuse, of the parish clergy. What we further say is that Wesley had in his mind ideas, if not plans, according to which the partial separation which had been begun might have been annulled, and the Methodist organisation, as such, might, at least in great part, have been made auxiliary to the Church of England, might have been the means of largely re-animating that Church, of absorbing not a little of explicit and professed Dissent, of making the Church living and truly national throughout the land. This was, for not a few years, the passion and dream of Wesley's life. The desire and hope of such a result, through his instrumentality, may have been kindled within him when, having, after long argument, been finally convinced by Peter Böhler as to the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith, he exclaimed, on occasion of that good man's leaving England, "Oh, what a work hath God begun since his coming into England, such an one as shall never come to an end till heaven and earth pass away!" He believed, as he intimates now and again in his private correspondence, that, had they been pleased to co-operate with him, the bishops might have accomplished this great work for their Church. Some of his preachers, with his approval, obtained orders in the Church of England. A few of the clergy, men of like convictions and spirit with himself—notably William Grimshaw and John Fletcher—united with their character and position as parish ministers the position and functions of Methodist assistant and preacher, in connection with Wesley. Even in drawing up his Poll Deed, in 1784, whereby his Conference was defined and legally constituted, Wesley left room for clergymen to be among

the number of his preachers, and inserted a special provision exempting any such clergyman, appointed to his chapels, from the law of itinerancy. Nor was there any necessary reason, that I can see, why the things he desired might not have come to pass, if the rulers of the Church of England had been favourably disposed. I see no reason, for instance, why City Road Chapel might not have been licensed as a chapel of the Church of England, and why, at the same time, such a proportion of the Methodist preachers—of the best and most gifted of them—might not have been ordained, that City Road and other such Methodist houses of worship, having been duly licensed as episcopal chapels, might have been regularly supplied by Methodist preachers who were also ministers of the Church of England. I see no reason why Methodism might not have been regarded and treated as a nursery of effective preachers for the Church, from whose ranks the ministry might have been continually recruited. If the same spirit, which is alive to-day in some parts of the Church of England, had existed in Wesley's time, who can doubt that some practical solution of the question which Wesley desired to see solved would have been found? At any rate those who now, a hundred years later, and a hundred years too late, insist that Methodism ought to come back bodily to the Church of England, and that it could do so without losing its own proper force and character, can hardly maintain that, if there had been a good-will so to do, the bishops of the last century could not have arranged for the recognition of Methodism, and the inclusion of Wesley and the great bulk of his preachers and people within the pale of the Church



of England. Now, if this had happened, the lines of practical separation between the Wesleyan Societies and the Church of England would have been effaced. But, because this was not done, they remained; they were deepened and extended; they proved to be the initiation of a permanent estrangement. The responsibility of this, however, was not with Wesley; but with that Church the conduct of whose ministers had first compelled him to make separate provision for his Societies, and continued through after years to perpetuate and aggravate and extend the estrangement which had been begun. If Wesley, notwithstanding, continued earnestly to exhort his people in general to frequent the churches, and used his influence successfully to prevent his preachers from declaring themselves separate from the Church of England, that fact shows not only his prudence and sagacity, but his forbearance. He believed the separatist spirit would do harm both to preachers and to people. He dreaded being a party to severing the ties which still united many of his people and a considerable proportion of his preachers to the Church of England. He was persuaded that the express adoption of the status and principles of a Dissenting sect would be very injurious to Methodism. To himself such a conclusion would have been in the highest degree painful and embarrassing; it would have placed him, indeed, altogether in a false position. For all through he loved his own Church and her services. If he took steps which seemed to look towards independency and separation, it was not that he loved the Church of England less, but that he loved the work and the means of saving souls more. If, therefore, there were to be

estrangement between the Church of England and his Societies, he was resolved all through that the blame should rest not on any separatist purpose or spirit in himself, but on the supineness or the intolerance or contempt of the bishops and clergy of the Church of England; that the estrangement should be imposed and forced upon, not sought or determined by the Methodists. Rightly understood, therefore, his whole course was consistent with itself. The key by which we are to unlock all the seeming inconsistencies in Wesley's course, and resolve them into instances of real consistency with the master-principle of his life, is simply this—Wesley was, first of all, an evangelist called of God to preach the Gospel, whether with or without ecclesiastical direction or consent, and after that,—next after, but still at a great interval,—he was a Churchman. That, of course, is to be—not exactly what is called a “good Churchman,” certainly not a strict or regular Churchman. But such a Churchman was John Wesley. He became such from the morrow, I might almost say, of his conversion.

*Rector.*—You convinced me, in our last conversation, that Wesley was not a High Churchman. But, if your description be correct, he was not only not a high, he was a very low and irregular Churchman, such a one as might well be the father of a schism. And yet I would not forget that schisms, so called, have played a great part in the providential progress of the Church of Christ, and viewed from another side are sometimes called reformatations. Churchman as I am, therefore, I do not wish to use the word in an invidious, but rather in a critical sense. But I should like to ask, as you

say that Wesley adopted almost from the period of his conversion that free view of his relations and obligations to the Church which you have stated, whether you found your statement on any specific evidence.

*Wes. Min.*—In his Journal, under date June 11th, 1739, little more than twelve months after his conversion, he thus, in a letter which he there prints, sets forth the principle which guided him, a principle from which he never afterwards departed :

1. "You ask, 'How is it that I assemble Christians who are none of my charge, to sing psalms, and pray, and hear the Scriptures expounded ? and you think it hard to justify doing this in other men's parishes, upon catholic principles.' Permit me to speak plainly. If, by catholic principles, you mean any other than scriptural, they weigh nothing with me : I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the holy Scriptures : but, on scriptural principles, I do not think it hard to justify whatever I do. God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish ; that is, in effect, to do it at all ; seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom then shall I hear, God or man ? If it be just to obey man rather than God, judge you. A dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me ; and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel. But where shall I preach it upon the principles you mention ? Why, not in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America ; not in any of the Christian parts, at least, of the habitable earth. For all these are, after a sort, divided into parishes. If it be said, 'Go back then to the heathens, from whence you came :' nay, but neither could I now (on your principles) preach to them ; for all the heathens in Georgia belong to the parish either of Savannah or Frederica. Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish ; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it

meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation."—*Journal*, June 11th, 1739.

And, with regard to the tendency of such a principle to lead to a "schism," as you say, Wesley having deliberately looked at this point, states and answers the question as follows in the Minutes of Conference for 1744.

2. "Do you not entail a schism on the Church ? that is, Is it not probable that your hearers, after your death, will be scattered into all sects and parties ? or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect ?

"Answer, (1.) We are persuaded the body of our hearers will, even after our death, remain in the Church, unless they be thrust out.

"(2.) We believe, notwithstanding, either that they will be thrust out, or that they will leaven the whole Church.

"(3.) We do, and will do, all we can, to prevent those consequences, which are supposed likely to happen after our death.

"(4.) But we cannot, with a good conscience, neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead."—*Minutes of Conference* (1744), vol. i., p. 6.

These extracts show from how early a period in his true Methodist course, after his conversion, Wesley had adopted the master principle of which I have already spoken, and that no Anglo-Catholic principles, no ecclesiastical scruples or proprieties, were allowed any weight in comparison with the calls of spiritual need appealing to his evangelical zeal and sympathy. If from the first he had foreseen all that has since happened, we have his own word for it here, that he would still have gone on his way.



*Rector.*—These extracts certainly seem to show that his principle was what you have stated it to be. Perhaps you can inform me how far, in the way of divergence from Church order, this principle carried your Founder in the course of fifty years.

*Wes. Min.*—Wesley himself gives an answer to your question. In his Journal, under date August 4th, 1788 (he was then eighty-five years of age), we find this entry :

“The sum of a long conversation [at the annual Conference] was—1. That in the course of fifty years we had neither premeditatedly nor willingly varied from it in one article of doctrine or discipline. 2. That we were not yet conscious of varying from it in any point of doctrine. 3. That we have, in a course of years, out of necessity, not choice, slowly and warily varied in some points of discipline, by preaching in the fields, by extemporaneous prayer, by employing lay preachers, by forming and regulating Societies, and by holding yearly Conferences. But we did none of these things till we were convinced we could no longer omit them, but at the peril of our souls.”

*Rector.*—Certainly a very formidable list of “variations.” And they do not appear to include the ordination of some Methodist laymen as presbyters which you informed me when we last conversed took place about this time. In fact, I hardly see in what single respect, during fifty years, Wesley had adhered to the discipline of his Church.

*Wes. Min.*—I am not concerned to show that he had in any. It is certain, nevertheless, that he had been the means of sending many to her churches and to her altars. Notwithstanding the unfriendly conduct of many of the clergy towards the Methodists, the

Methodist movement largely increased, on the whole, the attendance at the churches.

*Rector.*—No doubt this was the case. Nor did this effect of Methodism cease with Wesley's death, although it has become continually more and more indirect. But you stated some time ago that one reason, the first and the chief, why Wesley and the Methodists had left the parish churches was that they had been driven out. That is a material point in your historical statement and argument, and, though it cannot be pleasant to me to receive the information, I must ask you to be good enough to give some evidence on this point.

*Wes. Min.*—The evidence is unfortunately only too copious. I will begin by quoting Wesley's own general historical statement (in his "Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion") as to the manner in which himself and his brother and their converts were treated by the clergy from the first:

"The ministers of the places where this was done" (that is, where sinners were turned from sin to holiness), "ought to have received those ministers" (that is, those by whose instrumentality these sinners had been converted) "with open arms; and to have taken them who had just begun to serve God into their peculiar care; watching over them in tender love, lest they should fall back into the snare of the devil.

"Instead of this, the greater part spoke of those ministers as if the devil, not God, had sent them. Some repelled them from the Lord's table; others stirred up the people against them, representing them, even in their public discourses, as fellows not fit to live; Papists, heretics, traitors; conspirators against their King and country.

"And how did they watch over the sinners lately

reformed? Even as a leopard watcheth over his prey. They drove some of them also from the Lord's table; to which till now they had no desire to approach. They preached all manner of evil concerning them, openly cursing them in the name of the Lord. They turned many out of their work; persuaded others to do so too, and harassed them all manner of ways."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. viii., pp. 215, 216.

This was written in 1745. In the same year, writing of what then was very recent history, Wesley had thus described his experience since he began his evangelistic work:

"I have been drawing up this morning a short state of the case between the clergy and us. About seven years since, we begun preaching inward present salvation, as attainable by faith alone. For preaching this doctrine, we were forbidden to preach in churches. We then preached in private houses, as occasion offered; and when the houses could not contain the people, in the open air. For this, many of the clergy preached and printed against us, as both heretics and schismatics. Persons who were convinced of sin, begged us to advise them more particularly how to flee from the wrath to come. We replied, if they would all come at one time (for they were numerous) we would endeavour it. For this, we were represented, both from the pulpit and the press (we have heard it with our ears, and seen it with our eyes), as introducing Popery, raising sedition, practising both against Church and State; and all manner of evil was publicly said both of us and those who were accustomed to meet with us. But now several of the bishops began to speak against us, either in conversation or in public. On this encouragement, several of the clergy stirred up the people, to treat us as outlaws or mad dogs. The people did so both in Staffordshire, Cornwall, and many other places. And they do so still, whenever they are not restrained by the fear of the secular magistrate. Thus the case stands at present."—*Journal*, March 11th, 1745.

As the first practical separation was made at Bristol, and was in some sort the beginning and the root of all the series of separations that followed, it is of some importance to understand how it was forced upon the Wesleys. And here Charles Wesley's private journal, published many years after his death, furnishes us with points and details such as in John Wesley's journals, published within a short time after the events, are prudently omitted, or veiled in general terms :

"Our poor colliers," says Charles Wesley, "being repelled from the Lord's table, by the Bristol ministers, I exhorted them, notwithstanding, to continue daily, with one accord, in the temple; where the wicked administrator could neither spoil the prayers nor poison the sacrament."—*Journal*, July 20, 1740.

A week later he writes :

"I heard a miserable sermon at Temple Church, recommending religion as the most likely way to raise a fortune. After it, proclamation was made, that all should depart who were not of the parish. While the shepherd was driving away the lambs, I stayed, suspecting nothing, till the clerk came to me, and said, 'Mr. Beacher bids you go away, for he will not give you the sacrament.' I went to the vestry door, and mildly desired Mr. Beacher to admit me. He asked, 'Are you of this parish?' I answered, 'Sir, you see that I am a clergyman.' Here, dropping his former pretence, he charged me with rebellion in expounding the Scripture without authority, and said in express words, '*I repel you from the sacrament.*' I replied, 'I cite you to answer this before Jesus Christ, at the day of judgment.' This enraged him above measure; he called out, 'Here, take away this man.'"—*Journal*, July 27, 1740.

And again we read in the *Journal* :

"Mr. Carey's curate informed us that Mr. Carey had



ordered him to repel my brother and me from the sacrament.”  
—*Ibid.*, Sept. 7.

The following year Charles Wesley writes as follows :

“Sunday, April 12th.—I gave the sacrament to the bands of Kingswood, in obedience to the Church of England, which requires a weekly sacrament at every cathedral. But as they had it not there, and on this particular Sunday were refused at Temple Church (*I myself with many of them having been repelled*), I therefore administered it to them in our school ; and, had we wanted an house, would justify doing it in the midst of the Wood. I strongly urged the duty of their receiving it as often as they could be admitted at the Churches.”

A very striking illustration of the nature of the case with which Wesley had to deal is furnished by the following extract from a letter written by one of Wesley’s preachers, John Bennett, to Charles Wesley, in 1745 :

“The ministers of the Church persecute with all their strength. I desire your advice in this affair. With whom shall we join ? The society are some miles from the church, and cannot have fellowship with this people. They have a desire to know whether you or your brother, once or twice a year, would not deliver them the sacrament. As to my own soul, I am weakened much for want of partaking the ordinance ; and the minister of Chapel-en-le-Frith flatly denies me the Sacrament, and has ordered me and some others to be put out of the church.”—*Jackson’s Life of Charles Wesley*, vol. i., pp. 416, 417.

It is well known that John Wesley was repelled from the Lord’s Supper, in his father’s church at Epworth, by one who had been his father’s curate. The two following passages bear upon this point. The date was 1744. He says, in his Journal for June 17th of that year :

"I preached at Epworth. I came thither in season, for two such sermons as Mr. Romley preached on this day, so exquisitely bitter, and totally false, I cannot say I ever heard before."

And in his "Earnest Appeal," written the same year, he thus expresses himself:

"A clergyman so drunk that he can scarcely stand or speak may, in the presence of a thousand people (at Epworth), set upon another clergyman of the same Church, both with abusive words and open violence; and what follows? Why the one is still allowed to dispense the sacred signs of the body and blood of Christ; but the other is not allowed to receive them, because he is a field-preacher."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. viii., p. 29.

Again, in his "Farther Appeal," Wesley says:

"I have heard with my own ears such sermons, in Staffordshire particularly, that I should not have wondered if, as soon as we came out of the church, the people had stoned me with stones. And it was a natural consequence of what that poor minister had lately heard at the bishop's visitation, as it was one great cause of the miserable riots and outrages which soon followed."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. viii., pp. 220, 221.

Nor did lapse of years bring any general change in the conduct and policy of the clergy towards the Methodists. In 1777 Wesley writes:

"Mr. Corbett said he would gladly have asked me to preach, but that the bishop had forbidden him; who had also forbidden all his clergy to admit any Methodist preacher to the Lord's Supper."—*Journal*, June 1st, 1777.

So, in the year immediately preceding, we read in Moore's *Life of Wesley*, in regard to the same bishop (in the Isle of Man), that he "required every one of his

clergy to repel any Methodist preacher from the Sacrament, if he should offer himself at the table to receive it." (Moore's *Life of Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 270.) And he directed that his Pastoral Letter to this effect should be "read in full Church" (*plenâ Ecclesiâ*) throughout all the parishes of the island.\* Can any one wonder, can any one dare to find fault, if the Methodists, having for many years had such experience of the conduct and principles of the clergy, became increasingly disaffected to the Church and its services, and if an increasing number of Societies pressed upon Mr. Wesley, with growing earnestness, their desire to have separate services in Church hours, and the Sacraments administered to them in their own chapels?

Doctrinal grounds, also, were often added to their other reasons for absenting themselves from church. The case of Baidon, for example, near Keighley, where some persons had written to Mr. Wesley to know if he could advise them to go to church constantly, when they knew they should hear false doctrine there, was found, at the Conference of 1782, to be the case of many other places in different parts of the kingdom. (*Works*, 12mo, vol. xiii., p. 232.) And in too many cases, gross personal misconduct on the part of the clergy came in as a reason for separation from the Church. Here, for example, is the case of Epworth again, but this time in 1788:

"I came to Epworth, but was sorry to see scarce twenty communicants, half of whom came on my account. I was

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\* It is proper, however, to say that the good bishop who succeeded this prelate was of a different spirit; and the Methodists lived in peace among the churches and clergy of the island.

informed, likewise, that scarce fifty persons used to attend the Sunday service. What can be done to remedy this sore evil?

"I would fain prevent the members here from leaving the Church; but I cannot do it. As Mr. G. is not a pious man, but rather an enemy to piety, who frequently preaches against the truth, and those that hold and love it, I cannot, with all my influence, persuade them either to hear him, or to attend the Sacrament administered by him. If I cannot carry this point while I live, who then can do it when I die? And the case of Epworth is the case of every church where the minister neither loves nor preaches the Gospel. The Methodists will not attend his ministrations. What, then, is to be done?"—*Journal*, July 6th, 1788.

Thirty years before, writing to his brother, Wesley had said (in 1755), "'For such and such reasons'"—Joseph Cownley says—"I dare not hear a drunkard preach or read prayers. I answer, I dare. *But I cannot answer his reasons.*" In 1786 he said, "The last time I went to Scarboro' I earnestly exhorted our people to go to church, and I went myself. But the wretched minister preached such a sermon that I could not in conscience advise them to hear him any more."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. xii., pp. 109, 144.

The case had, indeed, become so extremely pressing that at length, in the year 1786, Wesley published the following question and answers:

"In what cases do we allow of service in church hours? I answer, 1. When the minister is a notoriously wicked man. 2. When he preaches Arian, or any equally pernicious doctrine. 3. When there are not churches in the town sufficient to contain half the people. 4. When there is no church at all within two or three miles. And we advise every one who preaches in the church hours to read the Psalms and Lessons, with part of the Church prayers; because we apprehend this



will endear the Church service to our brethren, who probably would be prejudiced against it, if they heard none but extemporary prayer."—*Minutes* (1786), vol. i., p. 193.

I have thus set before you an outline of the historical evidence on the subject as to which you made your last inquiry. If my answer has been long, and somewhat circuitous in its course, the nature of the case has unfortunately made this necessary.

I think it will be evident to you that Wesley and his Societies were driven, sorely against his will always, by the circumstances of the case, and especially by the character and conduct of the clergy, into a growing practical alienation from the Church of England. And when once practical separation had been established and had taken full effect in any one locality, it furnished a precedent always tending to reproduce similar separation elsewhere. For example, the reception of the Sacraments, from the Wesleys themselves, having, through the conduct of the clergy, become the practice at Bristol and the happy privilege of the Bristol Methodists, it could not well or long be withheld from the Methodists of London. The Societies at the Foundery after a while claimed the same privileges as the Societies at the Bristol and Kingswood preaching-rooms. And as one or other of the Wesleys was usually in London, while the brothers were debarred not only from administering the Sacrament, but from preaching in the London churches, which were very early closed against them, they, in violation, no doubt, of canons and rubrics, but in consistency with their character and responsibilities as not only ordained clergymen, but as the chosen pastors, and practically the only pastors, of

these Societies, resolved themselves to administer the Sacraments to their London Societies. This they did, first at the Foundery, and afterwards at the other chief preaching-houses in London and the suburbs. This movement in London culminated in 1778, when the New, or City Road, Chapel was built, with every provision for the requirements, spiritual and ecclesiastical, of a fully organised Church-fellowship, from infant baptism to holy burial. That noble, and, for its period, really wonderful ecclesiastical establishment at City Road was a type and prophecy of the fully developed Methodism which was to spread through the country. It is conceivable that City Road Methodism might have been adopted, with full recognition, into the Church of England, although that was not to be, and Wesleyans cannot affect to regret that Providence has ordered it otherwise. But that, if not so adopted and welcomed with all honour and affection, the Methodism of which that City Road Chapel, with its appendages, was the representative, could ever forego its position and prerogatives, is a thought too absurd for criticism.

*Rector.*—I follow your statement with interest, though not with pleasure. It seems as if the last extract you have quoted brings us very near indeed to separation. What was the next step in the process—ordination of the preachers, I suppose?

*Wes. Min.*—Your anticipation is correct. In the following year (1787-8) being unable, with only the help of Dr. Coke,—his brother was now dead,—to meet the growing calls from his increasing Societies for the separate administration of the Lord's Supper, Mr. Wesley ordained three, if not four, of his senior and most trusted

ministers to assist him in administering the Sacraments in England, as he had already ordained some for America and for Scotland. And at the Conference of 1788 he made a large extension of the permission to his Societies to have separate services in church hours. Such services, in fact, might now be held wherever the majority of a Society did not object to them.\* The rule, however, still was, even in these cases, that, on Sacrament Sunday at church, the Methodist forenoon service should be suspended. This restriction was not only a dictate of prudence but a matter of necessity. Besides the fact that some, often many, of the Society might still prefer to take the Sacrament at church, there was the still more cogent fact that the visits of Wesley and his ordained helpers to the vast majority of the Societies were so rare that arrangements could not be made except for very infrequent administrations.

I hope I have now made it clear that, in conformity with Wesley's master-principle, already stated, he had no alternative but to grant to his Societies, more and more widely, separate administration of the Sacraments and separate services in church hours. If he had not done this his evangelistic work would have been fatally hindered. I think you will also admit that, in the absence of any practical measures of recognition and comprehension on the part of the bishops and clergy, the same causes which, during Mr. Wesley's life, and notwithstanding all his immense personal influence in favour of conformity and of prolonged forbearance, had led to such distinct separation of many particular So-

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\* *Minutes of Conference*, 1788.

cieties—though not of the Conference or Connexion, as such—from the Church of England, could not but, after his death, lead to a rapidly growing and widening separation of the Societies, one after another. Nor can it be pretended, with any colour of truth, that such separation was inconsistent with the example and practice of John Wesley. The contrary is the truth, as my historical induction will have shown.

*Rector.*—No doubt you make out a strong case. A Churchman, like myself, with such evidence before him, might almost be inclined to say that modern Methodism had followed the example of John Wesley—his example and practice, however, rather than his precepts—only too faithfully and too far. Still is there not something yet wanting completely to make good your contention? Wesley, to the end, it would seem, refused to allow Methodist services, as a general rule, to be held in church hours on Sacrament Sunday. In that reserve there was still some recognition of the national character of the Church. But, after his death, that reserve was abandoned, and the last sign of anything like allegiance to our Church was done away.

*Wes. Min.*—By degrees that which you describe came to pass. For many years after the death of Wesley the same reserve was maintained in minor Societies, especially village Societies. Indeed, within the memory of some still living there were villages in which there never was any service in the Methodist chapel in morning church hours. But it was impossible that such cases should not continually diminish. Wesley's original limitation of his concession was, as I have intimated, a matter of necessity. As a general rule,

Methodists could only obtain the Sacrament at church. As yet but few of the preachers were ordained. Wesley and Coke could rarely visit any given place, and some places they never visited. The pulpits were supplied by the travelling and local preachers ; the classes were met by the leaders ; but at the Methodist preaching-house, there was, as a rule, no provision for administering the Sacraments. Hence Wesley could not but make the one reservation on which you lay such stress. It does not follow that he would, under altogether different circumstances, have disapproved, if his life had been extended so long, the gradual assimilation which took place during the thirty years following the period of his actual decease, between the practice in all the Societies of the Connexion and that which had prevailed almost from the beginning during his own lifetime, in the Societies of London and Bristol. In those Societies service was held in church hours, not only on other Sundays, but on Sacrament Sundays, for many years before Wesley's death—with the concurrence and co-operation, during the greatest part of the time, of his brother Charles, who supposed himself to be so strong a Churchman.

Within a few years after Wesley's death, by the irrepressible and invincible urgency of the Societies in general, and notwithstanding the opposition of many of the Trustees, headed with strange inconsistency, by those at London and Bristol, who had so long enjoyed total separation from the services of the Established Church, all the preachers had been constrained to assume in full the functions and responsibilities of the pastoral office. The necessary consequence of this



was that, as the Societies in succession came to desire and seek for, so they successively obtained, the administration of the Sacrament by their own ministers. Thus the reason for suspending their usual Sunday morning service on Sacrament Sunday ceased to exist, and the last outward trace of defect and inferiority, so far as related to the Church status and character of Methodism, came to an end. Without any Conferential decree, without any separative manifesto or decision, Methodism, still continuing to be Wesleyan, lost the last local links by which any of its Societies were bound to the Church of England. Like Wesley, the Methodists for the most part, after his death, wherever they could and as far as they could, had still remained friendly to the Church of England, and clung to its services, so far as they could do so, without detriment to their own free life and activity. But, like Wesley also, they found that the necessities of their evangelical life and the higher law of allegiance to the calls of Christ's kingdom and gospel tended increasingly to keep them away from the parish church, and as, with his face and his desires ever towards the Church, Wesley yet receded more and more from it through the course of fifty years, so his people, outliving their Founder but obeying the same law, continued for thirty years longer still to recede, without malice and almost without controversy, until more than fifty years ago the practical separation, from the Church of England, of ministers and people, of Societies and individuals, throughout all the territory of Methodism, had become complete.

*Rector.*—Your putting of the case is new to me. I fear your critics in our Church seldom go so deeply

into the "philosophy of history," in dealing with the case of Methodism, as, in these last observations, you invite me to go with you. Instead of offering any criticism on your remarks, at least at present, I will ask you now to do what you promised to do almost at the outset. You then said, though you have not much insisted on it since,—perhaps it was not material to your argument—but you said that, during Wesley's lifetime, some of the members of his Societies were express and theoretical Dissenters, and you promised that you would presently furnish me with evidence as to this point. May I ask you now to redeem your promise?

*Wes. Min.*—I had not forgotten it, and have the evidence ready. In 1788, Wesley wrote as follows:

"One circumstance more is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is the terms upon which any person may be admitted into their Society. They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees; let them be Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Independents, it is no obstacle. Let them choose one mode of baptism or another, it is no bar to their admission. The Presbyterian may be a Presbyterian still; the Independent or Anabaptist use his own mode of worship. So may the Quaker; and none will contend with him about it."—*Works*, 12mo, vol. xiii., p. 253.

In the self-same paper Wesley, however, and the fact is instructive, says that it is the glory of the Methodists that they "will not separate from the Church." What has been already explained will have made the meaning of this saying clear, and have shown that there was

here no real inconsistency. Wesley, in this paper, estimates the number of Dissenters in his Societies as one-tenth. I know not how much larger the proportion would be to-day of Methodists who, if they could not find a place in a Wesleyan chapel, would from distinct preference go to a Dissenting chapel for worship, even though there were an Evangelical church accessible. But it is certain that it would not by any means include the whole number of Methodists. It is doubtful whether it would include a majority.

We have just heard what Wesley said in 1788. Many years before, under date Sunday, October 31st, 1756, he had written in his Journal, "The Dissenters I sent to their respective meetings." And again under date Sunday, March 18th, 1759, he says, "I administered the Lord's Supper to near two hundred communicants. . . . A considerable part of them were Dissenters."

*Rector.*—It becomes evident to me that Wesley did not hold to any ecclesiastical theory; that he followed a practical law of life and growth. And therefore no Church theory, it would seem, can be made to fit him. But allow me to ask whether you really suppose that Wesley went on to the very end of his life, with his eyes shut to the fact, which seems so evident now in the light of actual history, that Methodism had already outgrown the position and character of a mere religious Society, outside of all Churches, and was virtually, in many respects, a separate communion—that it was inevitably destined to grow rapidly and soon into a completely organised Nonconformist denomination—and, indeed, that it already included within itself, besides many Societies suspended in an uncertain posi-

tion, a considerable number of what a Dissenter might call local Churches, completely equipped with all Church means and ordinances, and absolutely independent of the Established Church? The question cannot fail to have occurred to you, and I should like to know what you would say to it.

*Wes. Min.*—There can be no doubt that Wesley saw all this. He knew, as one of my quotations has shown, that a partial separation had already begun, and might grow indefinitely: he had said emphatically, as we have seen in another quotation, that unless Methodism leavened the Church of England with its own spirit, it would become a separate community. But he had made up his mind, as we have also seen, to run all hazards on this side, rather than neglect present and pressing occasions for preaching the Gospel and establishing a Gospel fellowship. He could and did trust Providence as to the future of the Society which he had founded. He would have accepted at any time the alternative of direct and distinct Dissent, utterly as he shrunk from this, rather than give up his evangelical work. “If we must either Dissent or be silent,” he said, “*actum est.*” \* For him the die would then have been cast in favour of Dissent. Still this would have been a very painful alternative. Whatever might happen after he died, he did most earnestly hope, and rejoiced in believing, that, during his lifetime, there would be no collective or ostensible movement of his Societies into a position of express separation from the Church.

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\* Rigg's *Churchmanship of John Wesley*, p. 94. In pp. 84—104 of that volume may be found a full discussion of this part of the subject under consideration.

But the very language in which he expressed this hope and trust sometimes betrayed how strong his doubts were of his Societies remaining after his death in the same suspended position as during his life. This state of mind is traceable in the words he wrote to his brother in 1785, "Indeed, I love the Church as sincerely as ever I did; and I tell our Societies everywhere the Methodists will not leave the Church, *at least while I live.*"\* And there is a remarkable passage in one of John Wesley's latest journals which shows how completely Wesley must have familiarised himself with the idea of Methodism as a Church, so that, in his easy and familiar writing, language escaped his pen scarcely consistent with any other view than that of Methodism as being in the full sense a Church. Under date August 26th, 1789, we find this entry in his Journal:

"I met the Society [at Redruth] and explained at large the rise and nature of Methodism, and still aver I have never read or heard of, either in ancient or modern history, *any other Church* which builds on so broad a foundation as the Methodists do, which requires of its members no conformity either in opinions or modes of worship, but barely the one thing, 'to fear God and work righteousness.'"

*Rector.*—Still I find it not easy to understand, whatever might be Wesley's trust in Providence, how he could be content to leave his Societies apparently on the verge of separation from the Church, and yet with no means or provisions made ready to enable them maturely to choose their course, and, if that should prove necessary, to organise themselves with due care and with

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\* See Rigg's *Churchmanship*, &c., p. 94.



needful authority into a Church. The fact that Wesley had made no such provision for the alternative of organising his Societies into a Church seems to me to have some force as an argument to show that he never contemplated such a consummation. Was not his omission, on this head, if your view of the situation is correct, rather like tempting than wisely trusting Providence?

*Wes. Min.*.—You have mistaken my meaning. I have not said that Wesley left his Societies, his Connexion, unprepared for the alternative of self-organisation as a Church. The fact is, that all the steps in the way of practical—though partial—separation and collective consolidation for his Societies which Wesley had taken from the beginning, were measures preparatory, whether from the first so intended or not, for the event of collective Church organisation, if that should prove necessary. And I, at least, have no doubt that several of the later and larger steps so taken were foreseen and intended by him as provisionally necessary in case of any such alternative being forced upon the Connexion. I could refer you, indeed, to more than one conversation in Wesley's Conferences showing how steadily he had for many years before the constitution in 1784 of the Legal Conference kept before his mind the necessity of making provision for the perpetuation of his Societies, and his evangelistic work, on an independent basis in case of his death.\* But without quoting these impor-

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\* See *Minutes*, vol. i., p. 44 (1749) and p. 88 (1769). In a note the instances referred to may be stated. They are very noticeable indeed. In 1749 he submits for consideration the following ques-

#### 4) IS MODERN METHODISM WESLEYAN METHODISM ?

tant and striking passages of his history, it will, I think, be evident on the face of the matter that, as I have said, the distinct stages of progressive separate organisation for his Societies were all in fact preparatory to the final and independent self-government of the Societies, by means of the Conference, after Wesley's death. Each partial separation of a Society—beginning with the sacramental administration in Bristol and Kingswood in 1739—had in it the principle and the root of collective practical separation for the Connexion. “ When (in 1740) he built meeting-houses, which were settled on trustees for his own use, and began to administer the sacrament in these houses, a further step was taken in the same direction. His calling out lay preachers (in 1741) wholly devoted to the work of preaching and visitation was still a step in advance towards the same issue. The yearly Conference (begun in 1744) tended obviously in the same direction. The legal constitution of the Conference in 1784, and the provision for vesting in trustees, under its jurisdiction

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tions, giving, however, no positive answer. It is plain that he wished to suggest matter for reflection to his coadjutors : “ May not all the Societies in England be considered as one body, united by one spirit ? May not that in London, *the mother church, consult for the good of all the churches ?* May not the stewards of this answer letters from all parts ; and give advice, at least, in temporals ? ” In 1769 he puts forth a scheme, to take effect in case of his death, for the union of all the preachers in England and Ireland after his death, and for the election of a Governing Committee of three, five, or seven, under a Moderator, to take full command of the Connexion, exercising all his own powers. Of course the constitution of the Legal Conference superseded all other plans for preserving the work.

as to the appointment of ministers and preachers, all the preaching places and trust property of the Connexion, for the use of the "people called Methodists," was a most important measure, giving to the union of the Societies a legally corporate character and large property rights." \*

The successive ordinations of ministers, first for America, then for Scotland, and finally for England, done by Wesley in virtue of his position at once as a presbyter bishop, and as the Father and Founder of the Societies, were pregnant lessons to the Societies and to the Conference, as to the right of extending such ordinations still farther, until all the pastors *de facto* should in form and public claims have become presbyter-bishops — "Scriptural episcopi" — in succession to John Wesley. And, lastly, his publication (in 1786 and 1788) of a Prayer-Book for the Methodists, including not only a liturgical Sunday Service, but all proper Church offices, not omitting an Ordination Service, and even revised Articles of Religion, this, perhaps above all, was a manifesto of the readiness of Methodism to take its position among the Churches, and of his willingness that it should take such a position, whenever its position of suspense should become no longer possible, and Providence should clearly indicate that the fulness of the time had come for its taking up its freedom and independent rights as one of the Churches of the nation. Thus was Methodism, even before the death of Wesley, almost fully fledged, and ready to take its independent

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\* Dr. Rigg's *Churchmanship*, &c., p. 84.

flight; or, to vary the figure, all but complete in its build and equipment, and well-nigh ready to be launched as a fully organised Church.

I hope the view I have now given is a sufficient reply to your acute objection lately stated.

*Rector.*—The subject is one which, from your point of view, I have not before now learnt to look at. I do not see any assailable point in your reply. I will merely ask further, at this point, whether, in fact, there did at any time before Wesley's death occur any occasion when the subject of his Societies and their relation to the Church of England became matter of mutual conference or communication between Wesley and the bishops, or any of them?

*Wes. Min.*—Perhaps not precisely in the sense you are thinking of; but in a certain sense something of that kind did take place in the last year of Wesley's life. The issue had been reached, to the possibility of which Wesley had looked forward with so much concern; the Methodists in certain parts of the kingdom had been driven, under episcopal administration, either to "Dissent or be silent." The Methodists found themselves forced either to register their meeting-houses as "Protestant Dissenting" places of worship, or else to forego all the protection and benefits of the Toleration Act. Under these circumstances Wesley wrote a pathetic letter addressed to the bishop who so dealt with his people. The whole letter is a truly wonderful production from the pen of a man who was eighty-seven years old.\* In it Wesley charges the bishop with "driving"

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\* The whole letter is given in Dr. Rigg's *Churchmanship*, &c., pp. 95, 96.

the Methodists "out of the Church in the most cruel manner; yea, and the most disingenuous manner." He adds: "They desire a license to worship God after their own conscience. Your lordship refuses it, and then punishes them for not having a license. So your lordship leaves them only this alternative, 'Leave the Church or starve.'" The date of this letter was June 26th, 1790, a few weeks before the last Conference at which Wesley presided. He was still hoping for relief from this stringent and impolitic application of the Conventicle Act—an Act which Wesley in the letter describes as "a vile execrable law"—up to the date of his death in the following spring. It was in this position that Methodism found itself at the Conference following Wesley's death. How could it be expected that the Conference, thus beset, and embarrassed, and provoked, would, after Wesley's death, turn its face to the smiters, and take its way back to the Established Church? The practical impossibility of breaking up its organisation would have sufficed to negative any such idea. But the temper and policy of the bishops and the clergy in general constituted a separate obstacle scarcely less insuperable.

*Rector.*—And yet I understood you to say that, after Wesley's death, the Conference did not, all at once, separate from the Church of England; and, indeed, that they have never, to this day, separated from the Church by any formal act, or made any rule by which the members of their Societies are forbidden to be also members of the Church of England.

*Wes. Min.*—That is so. What has happened since



the death of Wesley has been thus summarised in a passage with which I will close my statement of our Wesleyan case: "The Conference after Wesley's death acted in harmony with the spirit of their Founder. Even the enforcement of the Conventicle Act, the hardships of which were not removed till 1812, did not drive them into any extreme course. They suffered, indeed, between 1791 and 1795, the peace of the Connexion to be most seriously embroiled, and allowed many of their churches to be brought to the verge of dissolution before they consented to permit even the gradual extension of separate services in 'Church hours,' and of sacramental administration by their own preachers for the members of the 'Societies.' In giving this guarded permission they still did but follow the precedent of Wesley, and act in conformity with his spirit and principles. They never at any time decreed a separation of Methodism from the Church of England; that separation was effected by the particular Societies distributively, and the individual members personally, not at all by the action or on the suggestion, but only by the permission of the Conference. The Wesleyan Conference did not in fact recognise and provide for the actual condition of ecclesiastical independency into which the Connexion had been brought, until that condition had long existed; and Methodist preachers abstained from using the style and title appropriate to ordained ministers, and from assuming in any way collectively the language of complete pastoral responsibility, until by the universal action of the Connexion the 'Societies' had, of their own will,

practically separated themselves from the Church of England and forced their preachers into the full position and relations of pastors." \*

*Rector.*—I am bound to confess that you seem to have proved your points. I cannot any longer doubt that the wide divergence of Methodism from the Church of England to-day is but the prolongation of a movement, the lines of which, from the beginning and for many years, were traced under Wesley's own guidance. I must admit that Wesley himself led his people into the course which they have since consistently pursued. I thank you much for the trouble you have taken to inform me, and will now take my leave. I hope, in future, we may cultivate mutual relations, closer and not less friendly than in the past.

*Wes. Min.*—I wish you good morning, taking the liberty, however, to remind you, at parting, that separation was the necessary result of Wesley's work, not only for other and manifestly providential reasons, but for this reason in particular, that the Church of England failed to make any efforts whatever for the retention of Methodism, or its incorporation within its own system. The Church of England, accordingly, has no right to blame either Methodism or Wesley for the actual results. And surely it would be well if your great Church would learn to recognise the whole grand outcome, world-wide as it is in its extent and in its development, as most manifestly providential. The Church of England cannot afford to pit its claims and its influence against the claims and influence of all the Methodist Churches of

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\* Dr. Rigg's *Churchmanship*, &c., p. 103.

the world, an aggregate of Christian organisation and influence not less mighty or less impressive than that of the combined Anglo-Episcopal Churches of the world. "Judah should no longer vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim" have cause for anger against "Judah."

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